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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Acker, T. . V. (2016). Exploring the Legacies of Armed Rebellion in Burundi's Maquis par Excellence. *Africa Spectrum*, 51(2), 15-37. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-9757>

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# Africa Spectrum

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Van Acker, Tomas (2016),  
Exploring the Legacies of Armed Rebellion in Burundi's *Maquis par Excellence*,  
in: *Africa Spectrum*, 51, 2, 15–37.

URN: <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-9757>

ISSN: 1868-6869 (online), ISSN: 0002-0397 (print)

The online version of this and the other articles can be found at:  
<[www.africa-spectrum.org](http://www.africa-spectrum.org)>

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Published by  
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of African Affairs  
in co-operation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation Uppsala and Hamburg  
University Press.

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# Exploring the Legacies of Armed Rebellion in Burundi's *Maquis par Excellence*

Tomas Van Acker

**Abstract:** This contribution explores the legacies of armed rebellion in post-war Burundi, where two of the main political parties, the ruling CNDD-FDD and the FNL, are former rebel movements. It aims to add a micro-political perspective to the discussion on the transformation of rebel groups into political parties, and bring some nuance to the normative underpinnings of this debate. Based on observations of the role of local leaders with an FNL past, and of retrospective popular appreciation for wartime governance by the FNL in its stronghold of Bujumbura Rural, the paper argues that beyond the symptoms of a violent political culture, this legacy should also be understood as a complex source of post-war power and legitimacy.

■ Manuscript received 9 August 2016; accepted 28 August 2016

**Keywords:** Burundi, political systems, history of political parties, FNL, civil wars, guerrilla units

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The 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement heralded the end of decades of violent ethnic conflict and a full-fledged civil war that had started seven years earlier in Burundi. However, the two main Hutu rebel groups fighting the Tutsi-dominated institutions were not signatories to the deal. The integration of these groups into the peace process took several more years, and their recognition as political parties was only formally achieved in 2005 for the Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie National (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy, CNDD-FDD), and in 2009 for the Forces Nationales de Libération (National Forces of Liberation, FNL). The groups have since emerged as the most important political formations in Burundi. However, as recent evolutions in Burundian politics have amply demonstrated, the challenges involved in formally transforming into mainstream political parties continue to impact post-war political stability and security in Burundi.

The impact that this rebel past has had on the increasingly violent political arena since the end of the war is a topic of much debate in Burundi. Several characteristics of governance in the post-war era are often portrayed by its critics as symptomatic of the belligerent background of the now ruling CNDD-FDD. Since its victory in the 2005 elections, power in this party has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the former rebel leadership. A number of these individuals also control important instruments of the state's security apparatus, such as the police and the intelligence services (Vandeginste 2009). Additionally, the role of the CNDD-FDD's Imbonerakure<sup>1</sup> youth league in policing the public space and in keeping that space closed to opposition-party activity has become a major cause for concern.

In recent years, an emerging body of scholarship has looked into the transformation of armed movements into political parties, and their role in post-war settings. Prominent themes within this literature include the conditions that explain the success or failure of these transformation processes (Söderberg Kovacs 2007; De Zeeuw 2008; Jones 2013), the organisational challenges for party building (Manning 2007), and the consequences of these transformations for post-war democratisation and stability (Söderberg Kovacs 2008). Apart from these comparative studies, several particular cases of rebel-to-party transformations have been analysed from these perspectives as well, with Jones (2013) and Nindorera (2008, 2012) focusing on the CNDD-FDD's transformation in Burundi, and Alfieri (2014) taking a more socio-political look at the trajectory of the FNL.

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1 Kirundi: "those who see ahead."

According to Berdal and Ucko (2009), the post-war reintegration of insurgent groups entails more than their mere formalisation into political parties in order to partake in elections. Understanding these processes should also take into account the wider range of spaces in which rebel groups can continue to operate after the war. Berdal and Ucko (2009) argued for an approach that considers the continuities that persist during the passage from war to peace. The present paper aims to do just this by providing a localised, ethnographic perspective on the afterlife of rebellion in Bujumbura Rural, a stronghold of the FNL. It seeks to understand the legacies of rebellion through local narratives about the wartime presence of the FNL and to show how the nature of the FNL's interactions with the population during the war continues in the present day both to shape people's relationships with the party and to define the party's legitimacy and its role in local governance. As such, the paper also engages with scholarship on rebel governance and provides insights relevant for the study of public authority in post-war settings. Although I recognise the reliance on wartime military networks and on retaining a capacity for violence as important elements in both parties' post-war repertoires, I argue that legacies of armed rebellion should also be understood beyond the symptoms of violent politics, as a complex source of post-war legitimacy. In doing so, the aim of this study is to transcend the often normative focus on "success" or "spoiler potential" that characterises much of the literature on rebel transformations. The study also brings a subnational, micro-political perspective to this field, which is mostly concerned with the fate of former rebellions on the level of formal national politics.

After briefly discussing the data upon which this paper is based, the next section examines the post-war trajectories of the FNL and the CNDD-FDD, their impact on politics and society in Bujumbura Rural, and the role of violence in their repertoires. The main part of this paper will focus on the FNL, analysing this movement's historical presence during the war in an attempt to elucidate its ongoing appeal.

## Space, Time, and Data Collection

The insights in this article are based on fieldwork data collected between 2011 and 2015 in the province of Bujumbura Rural<sup>2</sup> within the framework of a research project that aims to understand local dynamics of power, public authority, and legitimacy in Burundi in the aftermath of

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2 Bujumbura Rural is the former name, still commonly used, of what is now officially called the Province of Bujumbura.

rebellion. We used ethnographic methods such as interviews and informal conversation, as well as observation. The majority of interlocutors were randomly selected citizens. In addition, we relied on a number of targeted key persons in the community, such as local authorities, civilian FNL sympathisers, former FNL combatants, and sympathisers of the CNDD-FDD and other parties, as well as persons with no specific political affiliation. Given the polarised context and in accordance with the agreement with our interlocutors, data is presented anonymously.

As its name suggests, Bujumbura Rural is adjacent to the Burundian capital of Bujumbura. It stretches from the plains around the estuary of the Rusizi River that forms the border with South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), along its heartland on the steep slopes of the Rift Valley, to the small stretch of coastal plain on Lake Tanganyika south of the capital city. These geographical features explain its strategic importance as Burundi's *maquis par excellence* during the war. Despite the CNDD-FDD rebellion forces briefly passing through, from 1998 onwards large parts of the province became strongholds of PALIPEHUTU-FNL,<sup>3</sup> whose domination of the area put pressure on the interim government and the peace process, and later on the first Nkurunziza government. Bujumbura Rural was the theatre of some of the fiercest confrontations between rebel forces and the Burundian army, especially after the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement.

The findings presented here are mostly based on data collected in the commune of Kanyosha, where our research covered all three administrative zones and the majority of the commune's *collines*.<sup>4</sup> While we can safely assume that the findings are also valid for the neighbouring communes in the hills of Bujumbura Rural that were part of the movement's stronghold, this localised perspective does imply that the insights presented here should not be used to generalise about the FNL's wartime practices and post-war legacy. It is important to note that PALIPEHUTU-FNL was not as consistently present in other parts of the country – and where it was, the nature of its relationship with local populations may have been different than it was in Bujumbura Rural. Thus, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL movement as a whole might well be perceived differently in other geographical areas within Burundi and the region.

It is also important to mention that data was collected in a specific timeframe. While most parts of Burundi had experienced more than a decade of increasing stability, in Bujumbura Rural, it had been only a mere

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3 PALIPEHUTU = Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu (Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People).

4 The *colline* ("hill") is the most basic administrative entity in Burundi.

three years since the demobilisation of the FNL and the end of hostilities. Thus, many of the insights on the relationship between rebels and the local communities are based on retrospective, albeit still relatively fresh material. Also, at the time of data collection, the FNL's situation, on both local and national levels, was very much in flux.

## Elections, Violence, and Local Governance in Bujumbura Rural

As the CNDD-FDD went on to become the country's most important political outfit, effectively ruling Burundi since the 2005 elections, PALIPEHUTU-FNL continued to fight, now against a Hutu-led government. It laid down its arms in 2009 after long and difficult ceasefire negotiations, just one year later taking part in elections. Importantly, in order to be able to obtain legal recognition as a party, the group dropped the historical "PALIPEHUTU," an ethnic reference forbidden by the Constitution. Some of its troops and members of military leadership were integrated into the Burundian armed forces, but many of the fighters were not accepted for full-scale DDR (disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration) benefits. In what was considered not a very good bargain for the movement, the FNL's military and political leader Agathon Rwasa was awarded an official position as head of the National Institute for Social Security. In 2010 the FNL participated in the polls, with Rwasa as its presidential candidate. Nationwide, it emerged as the second party in the local elections,<sup>5</sup> far behind the ruling CNDD-FDD, which received approximately 14 per cent of the overall vote. However, in most of Bujumbura Rural's communes the FNL won quite convincingly.<sup>6</sup> Still, the FNL leadership expected a better result nationwide and, together with most other major opposition parties, boycotted the rest of the electoral process, claiming that the CNDD-FDD's overall victory was based on massive fraud. Besides paving the way for the CNDD-FDD victory in the following presidential and legislative elections, this boycott also led to a post-electoral crisis. Rwasa went into hiding. In the course of 2011, the crisis worsened. While there was a nationwide crackdown against militants of opposition parties, especially those of the FNL, a number of attacks by unidentified

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5 Campaigning for these elections was largely based on presidential candidates rather than local candidates and programmes.

6 In the whole province, the FNL secured 85 seats out of 165, far more than the CNDD-FDD's 50 seats.

armed groups against government targets and targets affiliated with the CNDD-FDD gave rise to concerns that Burundi might return to civil war.

The commune of Kanyosha was arguably the most affected by the 2010 crisis, both in terms of security and concerning institutional stability. During fieldwork, it was still a highly contested political arena, in the grip of intense rivalry between the locally popular FNL and the national ruling CNDD-FDD. While the FNL was present in the commune for over a decade during the war, the CNDD-FDD's presence during the war was more limited, as it used its strategic position to carry out attacks on government positions or as a passage to its rear bases. Later, after signing a ceasefire with the transitional government, CNDD-FDD fighters engaged in joint operations with the Burundian army against the FNL in the commune. In the 2010 elections, after a relatively peaceful local campaign and the first-ever Election Day, the FNL won the communal vote in Kanyosha convincingly, securing 13 out of 15 seats. However, the subsequent withdrawal by the FNL meant that it was impossible to put in place a functioning communal council and administrator. This had serious repercussions in terms of service delivery to the population, as well as for the local administration's ability to attract external funding to initiate development activities. The Ministry of Interior appointed two interim administrators until, in November 2011, Kanyosha became the last commune in the country to have a council installed. Eight of the 13 elected FNL candidates had migrated to an unpopular, government-recognised wing of the FNL, and an administrator was also chosen from that formation. The one CNDD-FDD councillor elected became the president of the council. However, these official institutions had little popular legitimacy and were vulnerable to corruption and machinations. The institutional crisis intensified as, in 2013, under pressure from the president of the council, the administrator was dismissed for mismanagement, again provoking the intervention of the Ministry of Interior. FNL sympathisers interpreted these moves as sabotage stemming from the ruling party aiming both to demonstrate that people with an FNL background were not going to be able to govern the commune and to legitimise interference from the central state.

## Maintaining a Capacity for Violence in Peacetime

A major concern for several countries regarding the role of parties with a rebel past is their capacity and propensity to resort to violence. In the case of Burundi, it is clear that being able to demonstrate and make use of a certain capacity for violence remains an important part of the post-war



repertoire of both the CNDD-FDD and the FNL. By keeping the military command structures alive and remobilising ex-combatants, both parties have shaped the post-war militarisation of politics in Burundi. This was also the case in Bujumbura Rural, where part of the FNL militant base remobilised during the 2010 crisis and engaged in anti-regime violence. However, it is important to stress that militarised politics has been a persistent feature of postcolonial rule in Burundi and should be understood in terms of structural legacies of the single-party state (Van Acker 2015: 5). Interestingly, a phenomenon like the CNDD-FDD's notorious Imbonerakure youth league, which for many Burundians epitomises the ruling party's rebel roots, owes much to the way that UPRONA's JRR youth league<sup>7</sup> was involved in policing and controlling the countryside (see, for instance, Laely 1995: 427). In fact, like many other rebel groups, both PALIPEHUTU-FNL and the CNDD-FDD copied several features of the political system they fought, both in terms of institutional architecture and regarding the role played by violence and coercion. It should also be noted that in the era of liberal peace, former rebels have not been the only ones to resort to violence: in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, Alexis Sinduhije, founder of the Mouvement Pour la Solidarité et la Démocratie (Movement for Solidarity and Democracy, MSD) – a party rooted in Bujumbura's vibrant civil society and media scene and which, upon its formation in 2009, incarnated the aspirations of the post-war urban cosmopolitan generation – was linked by UN experts to Burundian armed groups in the DRC. An important faction of this party militarised during the 2015 crisis and has been a driving force in armed resistance against the Nkurunziza regime. Indeed, as Mehler (2007: 211) suggested, violence is a recurrent, if not dominant mode of electoral competition in Burundi, and it is not limited to (former) rebels. In the case of the FNL, Alfieri (2014) brought some nuance to the study of the role of violence, arguing that violence should not be seen as an essential part of the movement's nature, but rather as a tool, mobilised across war–peace boundaries, in the context of a broader political project.

## Local Governance in Bujumbura Rural after the War

After criticism from human rights organisations and international partners, the intensity of repression against FNL militants diminished some-

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7 UPRONA = Union pour le Progrès National (Union for National Progress); JRR = Jeunesses Révolutionnaires Rwagasore (Revolutionary Youth Rwagasore).

what in 2012, but the Rwsa wing of the FNL was still deemed illegal, forcing militants to operate clandestinely in Bujumbura Rural.

Since joining the political mainstream in 2009, the FNL had had several offices in different zones of Kanyosha. By mid-2012, however, there was almost no sign of Rwsa's party in the public sphere. Infrastructure closed down and public meetings or other overt political activities came to a halt. Remarkably, the CNDD-FDD, which had proven to enjoy only limited popular legitimacy (if we judge from the 2010 ballots in Kanyosha), was the only party to have its flag raised in the commune's administrative centre. Some of the FNL's most prominent and powerful members were either killed or arrested, or had moved. Whereas the party's public presence had been dealt a serious blow, our exploration of the informal dynamics of power and public authority that occurred in the commune indicates that the FNL is still strongly embedded in the region and, against all odds, continues to leave its mark on local social and political life.

A considerable amount of influence is exercised in Kanyosha by a range of individuals who are referred to as *imboneza*: leaders in the community. There are differences in the scope of their influence, some operating only on the hill level, while others are recognised members of the local elite and have an influence that goes beyond the limits of the commune. But they all share certain important features. Most of these men and women play a prominent role in daily matters of governance. Some are, or have been, *chefs de colline*, but the most powerful are not part of the local administrative apparatus or recognised as politicians. Their role seems to correspond to what Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan (2002) have called "local development brokers": intermediaries between the community and external providers of development assistance and funding. Some are development entrepreneurs in their own right, initiating the provision of services to the population, from drinking-water and sanitation facilities on their hill, to large-scale local health insurance. They have the capacity to mobilise resources, but also people – and thus an electorate. They are often approached to mediate and give their advice on a broad range of matters. As such, they operate as a shadow elite, exercising a considerable amount of influence on official decision making in the commune, and are often more powerful than the *de jure* authorities.

While their rise to prominence in some cases happened earlier, most of these *imboneza* emerged during the war and had links to PALIPEHUTU-FNL, some as active members of its civilian wing, some as sympathisers or even combatants. Even though not all of these leaders operate explicitly as FNL agents, several did contribute strongly to main-

taining the movement's imprint on local politics and governance. Especially at a time when the party has to operate clandestinely, it is able to stay alive, mobilise its networks, and ensure that communication from different levels in the party continues to pass through.

These individuals, especially those elected as hill authorities, were under a lot of pressure to join the CNDD-FDD, and a number of them did so. At the same time, influential positions in the commune, such as school managers, have been appointed to CNDD-FDD sympathisers. There are a number of ways in which the FNL has dealt locally with these pressures and with the operationally clandestine position it found itself in. After a period of retaliatory violence, militants began to adopt more subtle ways of resisting the CNDD-FDD's attempts to make its mark on the commune. These included pretending to adhere to the ruling party or to the new, government-friendly FNL wing. These tactics were sanctioned by the Rwsa wing, which recognised the security issues faced by its influential members. At the same time, there were also acts of subtle resistance, including boycotting meetings and rallies by the officially recognised FNL wing (which was increasingly considered an auxiliary of the ruling party). Another example was the boycott of *travaux communautaires* (a semi-obligatory policy of participation in public infrastructural works) when these were being attended by high-ranking CNDD-FDD officials and militants dressed in T-shirts with the party logo. While some of these forms of resistance occurred spontaneously, others were more coordinated, and Rwsa's FNL remained a considerable mobilising force among the population.

## Order, Ideology, and Intimacy: Memories of Daily Life in the *Maquis*

The FNL's current uncertain legal status, the repression against its militants, and the fact that Rwsa had disappeared from Burundi's political scene for three years clearly set back the party's process of post-war integration. The resilience and ongoing popularity of the FNL that was manifest after 2010 in Bujumbura Rural and beyond – as illustrated by the large crowds of supporters that greeted Rwsa upon his return in 2013 – does not seem evident at first sight. Since its inception, the FNL has undergone a number of transformations, split-ups, and name changes. The current emanations of the FNL all go back to Remy Gahutu's PALIPEHUTU, a political movement that aimed to emancipate Burundi's Hutu majority and contest the Tutsi domination of the state. Created in 1980 in the Mishamo camp for Hutu refugees in Tanzania, PALIPEHUTU's origins go back to

diaspora student-activist groups that operated mainly from Belgium and Rwanda. PALIPEHUTU soon established networks in Burundi, but after only a few years an armed wing, the FNL, became operational, launching its first attacks in 1991. After the murder of the first elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, his FRODEBU<sup>8</sup> party created the FDD armed movement, which soon developed a proper political wing, the CNDD. Several PALIPEHUTU-FNL members migrated to the CNDD-FDD and became crucial to that party's success (Jones 2013: 198). The CNDD-FDD managed to attract more resources and fighters than PALIPEHUTU-FNL and quickly became the more powerful rebellion, operating in large parts of the country as well as in the wider region. As the first movement on a national level to promote Hutu consciousness and denounce the Tutsi domination of army and government, the FNL was the forerunner of the FRODEBU party and of the CNDD-FDD and its offshoots. However, it has never been able to capitalise on this vanguard role in the Hutu movement. Moreover, its strategies during and after the peace process have sometimes been puzzling, even ending up working to the advantage of the CNDD-FDD's rise to prominence. With the latter's dominance over the state, the FNL's historical claim to Hutu power has become less pertinent today.

In the heydays of its armed resistance, from the 1990s until 2008, PALIPEHUTU-FNL gained notoriety as a fierce, determined, and ruthless rebellion. This reputation is as much based on its guerrilla fighting against its main target, the Burundian army, as on its involvement in a number of high-profile attacks on civilian Tutsi targets. Over the years, especially under the leadership of Rwaso, religion played an increasingly important role in the movement's ideology and action. Elements of Old Testament symbolism (the revelation of a "promised land" for Hutu) were combined with a strict Evangelical-Protestant ethic that played an important role in the way the movement operated, both on and off the battlefield. These influences have contributed to the aura of mystery that is sometimes attributed to the FNL but also to the image of a fundamentalist religious group in the vein of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (Romkema 2007: 72). When PALIPEHUTU-FNL laid down arms in 2009, this image of a cruel, savage, and irrational movement continued to speak to the imagination and dominate the perception of many Burundians and other observers.

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8 FRODEBU = Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi (Front for Democracy in Burundi).

**“Today we are mourning, because the party we voted into power is not here.”**

However, the feelings described above are in stark contrast to the narratives of residents of the communes in Bujumbura Rural. Enquiring about the relationship between the armed movement and its civilian environment during the conflict, another image emerges. A great number of the interviewees identified strongly with the movement and spoke in affectionate terms about PALIPEHUTU-FNL and Agathon Rwaso. Even though it was widely recognised that there were abuses and coercion, especially in the beginning of PALIPEHUTU-FNL’s time in the area, people who expressed having suffered at the hands of the movement often also painted a more nuanced picture, recognising certain accomplishments. The dominant narrative that emerged is one of a close bond between the rebel force and the local community. In fact, for many in the commune, the later years of the civil war period, when the FNL dominated the region, are looked upon not just as a time of distress and breakdown, but also as a period of order, integrity, righteousness, transparency, and mutual respect. Conversely, the current situation, in which the party’s future remains uncertain and faced with repression by the CNDD-FDD, is a source of frustration and sadness.

In the seminal *Purity and Exile*, Malkki (1995) showed how narratives of Hutu victimhood were crucial in the “mythico-historical” worldviews of Hutu refugees in Mishamo, the camp where PALIPEHUTU was founded in 1980. Turner (1998: 23–24) argued that not only did these narratives emerge out of the social conditions of the camps, but that they should also be understood as constitutive parts of political ideologies. Furthermore, as the political context changed, both in the camps and in Burundi overall, PALIPEHUTU adapted these constructs. The movement saw Hutu as not simply subject to Tutsi domination, but also as victims of CNDD-FDD conspiracies (Turner 2010: 155). In a context in which CNDD-FDD repression of FNL sympathisers was a tangible part of everyday life in the hills, it comes as no surprise that notions of subalternation and victimhood were also echoed in several conversations with FNL militants in Bujumbura Rural. It is tempting to interpret this as part of a longer tradition in which Hutu, and especially the FNL, have been cast as underdogs in prevailing power relations, and it is not implausible that these kinds of narratives continue to have legitimising potential. However, this in itself does not explain the mobilising power of the FNL in Bujumbura Rural today. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, the FNL’s post-war legitimacy and power in Bujumbura Rural should be understood through

the way people there remember and (re-)evaluate their province's cohabitation with the FNL and the movement's way of governing during the war.

The nature of insurgent groups' relationships with civilians and the structures that such groups put in place – in order to exercise authority over local populations and seek their collaboration, and to regulate economic activities in the areas under their control – have received a considerable amount of scholarly attention (Weinstein 2007; Mampilly 2007; Arjona et al. 2015). It is clear that rebel groups depend in some way or another on the civilian population in the territories which they seek to control, and therefore often need to establish relationships with local communities that are not determined by their capacity for violence and coercion alone. As pointed out by former local commanders of the movement, establishing good relationships with the local population was also part of PALIPEHUTU-FNL's strategy when they arrived in Bujumbura Rural in 1998. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the approach of the movement towards cohabitation with and governance of its host communities, in order to demonstrate how the memories of these interactions, and of the order that the movement managed to establish during the war, continue to contribute to its appeal as a party today.

### **“They were the only ones who worked for us.”**

There are few first-hand wartime accounts of the way PALIPEHUTU-FNL operated and evolved on the local level, of how it was organised, and of the nature of the relationship of both its civil and military structures with local populations and institutions in Bujumbura Rural, or elsewhere. However, ex-post impressions based on interviews with civilians, ex-combatants, local authorities from the time, and long-time local members of the movement revealed a fairly coherent picture of the way PALIPEHUTU-FNL was embedded locally.

While the conflict in Burundi was not about territorial claims, the ability to exercise a level of control over the plain and hills surrounding the capital was an important strategic goal for the rebellion, as it made it possible to put pressure on the government. It is important to note, however, that PALIPEHUTU-FNL never had total territorial control: official state authorities remained in place throughout the war, and government security forces were very much present in certain parts of the area. Nevertheless, as the following sections will make clear, the movement was able to make its mark on many aspects of daily life in the communities during the war and assumed a number of sovereign functions within the area.

Although no exact figures could be found regarding the number of local civilian cadres in the movement, and despite our interlocutors' estimations varying too much to provide a reliable insight into this matter, it is clear that during the course of the war PALIPEHUTU-FNL's civilian divisions were present throughout all levels of the state's territorial organisation, from the province through the commune, down to (according to several sources) all of the subsections of the hills in the commune. These divisions played an important role both as operational support for the combatants and in daily matters of local governance in the communes. Interviewees often used the term "*administration parallèle*" to describe the local institutional set-up of the movement, which was in place until demobilisation in 2009 in some places. In most communes of Bujumbura Rural, these institutions were able to build on the pre-war presence of clandestine PALIPEHUTU local committees, along with the movement's youth league, the Jeunesse Patriotique Hutu (Patriotic Hutu Youth, JHP), and its women's league, the Mouvement des Femmes Patriotiques Hutu (Movement of Patriotic Hutu Women, MFPH). These structures, which PALIPEHUTU ideologues saw as the vanguard of a new political system in Burundi, existed since PALIPEHUTU's very inception in the camps in Tanzania and were later installed in many parts of Burundi. However, whereas these grassroots divisions' basic role in the pre-war period was to spread PALIPEHUTU ideology, they grew and transformed considerably in function, having aided the war efforts of the movement's armed wing since 1998. Therefore, even when most of the initial combatants and members of military leadership were not native to the region, the movement had an already-existing local network to fall back on.

The mobilisation of resources was one of the core tasks of the administrative apparatus that PALIPEHUTU-FNL put in place, not only in Bujumbura Rural. There are no indications that PALIPEHUTU-FNL was involved in large-scale economic exploitation in the areas where it operated, whether in Burundi or elsewhere in the region. Substantial material and monetary support seems to have come from members of the diaspora, and sometimes from states (the Rwandan government before 1994) and armed forces in the region (Romkema 2007). But civilian contributions were essential for sustaining the rebellion's local presence in the community and for supporting the broader war effort in other places, as well as for buying guns and ammunition. In addition to supplying food to the combatants stationed on the hill, often voluntarily, families and local business were also making regular monetary contributions so that the troops could buy additional food and cover other daily expenses, such as medication. Other resources were extorted from the



communal authorities and humanitarian agencies. Transport operators passing through the area also paid “taxes.”

While many people experienced these contributions as a burden, it was also reported that there was often space for negotiation in cases when the amount could not be paid directly. And even if large parts of the community clearly considered this taxation by the movement to be coercive, the tax also seemed to be relatively uncontested by the interviewees, who viewed it as part of a reciprocal relationship. In fact, integrity and transparency are two qualities that were often associated with the exercise of public authority by PALIPEHUTU-FNL. For example, the group took care to show that the organisation of these taxation practices was not arbitrary. The group communicated clearly about amounts and timings, and provided official PALIPEHUTU-FNL receipts as proof of payment. The administrative entities of the movement did not have offices as such, but did utilise paraphernalia of officialdom, such as receipts and stamps, and issued documents explaining the pertinent rules and structures, all with the movement’s official logo on them. Mampilly (2015) identified similar symbolic practices of re-enacting the state by rebel movements, and argued that they are both part of a legitimising strategy and a way to ensure civilian compliance.

Co-optation of existing state-recognised local authorities on the hill level (*chefs de colline*), was another important part of PALIPEHUTU-FNL’s strategy to govern the local communities. These *chefs* received training and guidance from the movement in order to mobilise, organise, and teach the families on the hills. They played an important role as intermediaries between the civilian population and the local command post, but also between the rebels and the higher-level local state authorities and administrative personnel in the commune. As several interviewees noted, many of these local officials worked for the state during typical business hours but were at the service of the rebellion afterwards. These blurred lines between the official local state and the rebellion were a crucial factor during the war, and the legacy of that blurring continues to play a big role today: as indicated above, several of these hill *chefs* are still in office or occupy other positions in the commune and, just like other cadres from the movement’s civilian wing, continue to enjoy legitimacy.<sup>9</sup>

Several scholars have looked into the provision of security and justice in the governance repertoire of rebel groups (see, for instance, Raeymakers 2007 and Förster 2015). Whereas these arrangements often have the po-

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9 It is difficult to obtain exact figures, as hill *chefs* were under pressure to adhere to the CNDD-FDD and to deny being involved with the FNL.



tential to become mere protection rackets, providing security and justice – core tasks associated with the state – can also be an important legitimisation strategy for rebel groups seeking the cooperation of host civilian populations. In the case of the FNL in Bujumbura Rural, these activities had both strategic and political objectives. It was important for the FNL to minimise the physical suffering and material loss amongst the host population on which it relied; however, as one local commander said, there was also a need to demonstrate to the population that PALIPEHUTU was capable of doing better than the government and the army. Many of our interlocutors spoke of the positive role the movement played in policing and providing justice. On the hill level, PALIPEHUTU-FNL cadres mediated conflicts between family members and neighbours and set up informal courts that administered verdicts and imposed penalties. Here as well, official documents were issued. In case the verdict was not accepted by one of the parties, a copy of the verdict with motivation was sometimes provided for referral to another, official jurisdiction.

PALIPEHUTU-FNL's role as moral police was highlighted and appreciated by many. Under Rwasa's leadership, the ideology and discourse of the movement became increasingly influenced by Evangelical ethics, which informed both the movement's internal code of discipline and the way it sought to create order and provide justice in the communities. Much to the appreciation of many people in the commune, the group took a particular interest in dealing with cases of adultery, prostitution, premarital relationships among youth, gambling, and alcohol abuse. As was also the case with the rebel-organised security provisions in Northern Côte d'Ivoire described by Förster (2015: 116), FNL security practices made everyday life in Bujumbura Rural – when there was no fighting going on – safer for most people.

Another important element of the local appreciation of PALIPEHUTU-FNL was the strong internal discipline of the movement, based on austerity and sobriety. This was often compared to the more abusive behaviour of the Burundian Armed Forces and of the CNDD-FDD. Members of the fighting force were forbidden from drinking, having sexual relationships, and stealing from the population. Abuses against civilians by FNL fighters were not exceptional in the beginning. These abuses could be reported through the *chef de colline* or members of the youth wing, who played an important role in policing and surveillance, both in the community and within the movement. Sentences, often carried out publicly, ranged from disciplinary measures or orders to pay fines to imprisonment (sometimes in improvised, dug-out cages) and, for repeated or severe cases, such as treason, the death penalty.

In the interviews, among the most cited services provided by the movement was passive protection against abuses from government soldiers. Several people spoke of how the FNL recommended that the local population obey orders from the Burundian army soldiers as much as possible, without betraying positions of the rebel fighters, in order not be harassed. And there were several accounts of how FNL fighters informed civilians ahead of planned attacks so that they could seek cover.

### “They treated us like humans.”

Recently, a number of studies on post-war Burundi have pointed to the importance of *ubushingantabe*, a set of values that many Burundians believe should be at the core of political enterprise in Burundi. This complex, uniquely Burundian concept underpins the institution of the *bashingantabe*, councils of noble men who traditionally provided justice and functioned as the moral and political authorities on their hills. Sometimes translated as “integrity,” *ubushingantabe* refers to a broader set of ideals and virtues, including righteousness, fairness, socialness, self-control, sagacity, responsibility, reliability, honour, discretion, and equity. Ingelaere and Kohlhagen (2012) examined this notion to understand people’s expectations of (transitional) justice; they viewed it as an essential element of the social imaginary of Burundians and as one of the organising principles of social existence. Similarly, in his study on the post-war experiences and perspectives of Burundian youth, Uvin claimed that these values are still deeply alive among Burundians, and saw in the concept of *ubushingantabe* a Burundian counterpart to the Western discourses of good governance and human rights. Basically, *ubushingantabe* conveys how people expect their authorities to treat them (Uvin 2008: 65). The importance of these values was also evident in my own research findings on the nature of public authority in Bujumbura Rural.

As Ingelaere and Kohlhagen point out, the principles of *bushingantabe* are continually transposed in various contexts, as a framework for the appraisal of those who judge and rule. We do not suggest that this concept as such would be immediately applicable to PALIPEHUTU-FNL’s 12-year-long presence in the area. Furthermore, none of our interlocutors explicitly stated that PALIPEHUTU-FNL, or individuals within the organisation, represented these values, or literally referred to this concept, and it was also not part of the FNL doctrine. Nonetheless, it is clear that the qualities that were attributed to the kind of order that the movement produced in the communes in fact do correspond to some of the main principles and values that underlie the concept. And, in a time of insecurity and distress according to the perception of a large part of the population,

the movement definitely seemed to come closer to embodying this ideal-type than other state and non-state power holders did.

**“We lived together in the same houses,  
like they were our brothers.”**

Shah (2013) argued that, apart from classical models of explaining rebel mobilisation and civilian participation in rebel-occupied areas – greed, grievance, and coercion, there are other processes at work in zones where rebels and civilian populations find themselves together. These have been largely underplayed in the literature. Writing on the Maoist insurgencies in India’s “Naxalite belt,” Shah highlighted the significance of relationships of intimacy between insurgents and the people living in guerrilla zones. While she clearly identified grievances and ideological considerations as relevant factors in people’s motivation to sympathise with or join the guerrillas, she also argued for a profound exploration of social relations between movements and local populations in order to understand the depth of the people’s engagement with the rebel forces. The narratives from Bujumbura Rural suggest that this notion of intimacy is well suited to capture the FNL’s wartime presence. Many people testified to the camaraderie, close bonds, and family-like ties that were formed between the rebels and the local community over the years of war. Beyond the legitimacy it derived from its governance actions, this “intimacy of insurgency” was another important aspect of the FNL’s success in mobilising the local communities behind its cause for such a long time.

For Shah, the notion of intimacy is also closely related to ideology. Before taking up arms, PALIPEHUTU had taught its ideology in the communes of Bujumbura Rural since the mid-1980s. With an explicit focus on self-awareness and the emancipation of the Hutu population and its liberation from the Tutsi hegemony, ethnicity was at the heart of this ideology right from the start. As one influential member of the community put it:

After the massacres in 1972, we Hutu felt broken and dehumanised.  
When the PALIPEHUTU came to us, they said: you are a Hutu,  
and you’re a beautiful person as well.

This emancipatory ideological discourse played a crucial role in the movement’s nationwide appeal among the Hutu peasantry and was important for attracting new recruits (Uvin 2007: 5). It is clear that local popular solidarity with the movement should also be understood in

terms of the appeal of its ideology, as the predominantly Hutu population, many of whom worked in the capital as day labourers, were exposed to the exclusionist politics of the Tutsi elite on a daily basis. Similar to Naxalite rebels in India, PALIPEHUTU-FNL's ideology contributed to a feeling of unity and community and seemed instrumental in its fighters' gaining acceptance in their host environments as "one of them" (Shah 2013: 19).

When PALIPEHUTU-FNL's military wing arrived on the scene in Bujumbura Rural in the late 1990s, the majority of its leadership and combatants hailed from interior provinces and had few pre-existing local ties. Later on, local combatants also joined, often from among the JHP youth that had been assisting the rebellion. However, according to one local FNL organiser, these were still a minority, as the proximity to the capital meant that there were more economic opportunities and thus a smaller recruiting base.

A crucial factor in understanding the presence of the FNL and the kind of relationships it developed in the area is that these visiting combatants basically lived among the families on the hills. The particular traits of the landscape itself in those very densely populated communes on the steep slopes bordering the capital, with little forest cover except for small patches of banana plantations, did not allow for large-scale deployment of troops or big bush camps. The rebellion operated in small units of fighters, with a military position on top of the hills and combatants housed with host families.

When not occupying their positions, combatants spent a lot of their time among the population, mostly dressed in civilian outfits, sharing food, playing games, helping on the fields, and engaging in prayer sessions and small talk, but also teaching PALIPEHUTU ideology. As such, the FNL combatants, even sometimes the highest-ranking leaders, were part of the everyday landscape of social interactions on the hills, and their presence was very tangible down to the household level.

In what seems a somewhat contradictory statement, given that the presence of the rebellion made Bujumbura Rural one of the most insecure parts of the country, several people expressed that they felt protected by the rebels' presence. The overall impression is that the movement tried to accompany its host population through the war; for instance, when they advised people to cooperate with government forces in order to avoid getting harassed. However, some civilians who assisted the movement during the war proudly described a sense of complicity. These sentiments are also expressed by the movement's former fighters. A number of non-local former combatants have settled in the region and

continue to live and work among the host families. As one of them stated: “We have stayed here because we feel respected, protected, and cared for.” Similarly, several interlocutors nostalgically deplored the fact that these relationships could no longer be trusted given the CNDD-FDD’s offensive to co-opt FNL members and coerce ex-combatants into cooperating with the intelligence services after the 2010 crisis.

## Conclusion

In Burundi, the two main rebel groups involved in the civil war have become political parties. Their trajectories differ greatly. The CNDD-FDD has established itself as the ruling party for more than a decade. The FNL, on the other hand, has struggled to survive as a formal party despite its considerable militant base. These two parties have been protagonists in a political crisis that started in 2010 and exploded in 2015. While this resurgence in political violence cannot be causally explained by the rebel pasts of these parties, the resilience of wartime rebel command structures and networks of former combatants has profoundly shaped the dynamics of post-war political violence in Burundi, both on the national and subnational levels.

However, it is important to understand the legacy of former rebellions in post-war settlements beyond the often normative underpinnings of much of the academic and public debate on the subject. The insights from this micro-political perspective on the afterlife of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebellion in Bujumbura Rural show how a rebel past can also be an important and complex source of post-war legitimacy and power.

An important dimension here is the resilience of the civilian networks of support that the movement established during the war. Even though the FNL’s formal structures are weakened and fragmented, and the party has gone underground, these networks are still making their mark on socio-political life on the hills. A number of individuals have emerged from these wartime rebel structures to become influential informal leaders today. They play an important role in everyday governance in the former rebel strongholds, but also in keeping the FNL relevant as a party in a context of electoral competition, administrative repression, and the persecution of its members. Typically, in interventions that have aimed to support the integration of rebel movements into mainstream politics, actions have focused on DDR programmes for combatants, or on the assistance of the elite leadership, and these local civilian institutions developed by rebel groups are often neglected. However, the insights from the FNL case suggest that these can be an im-

portant form of political capital for parties with a rebel past, and we believe that this is an interesting area for further research that can broaden our understanding of the role of former rebellions in post-war political settlements.

Furthermore, the analysis of the way PALIPEHUTU-FNL's relationship with local society is remembered in narratives of the civil-war period also hints at less tangible, emotive aspects that continue to nourish the charisma of the movement and its leadership, and are in this way an important source of its post-war social legitimacy. The memories and appreciation of the kind of order that the FNL managed to establish during the war are a testament to the close bonds that were formed between the movement and its host population, and the feeling of shared destiny that was part of the ideology. Moreover, the way the FNL ruled speaks to important Burundian cultural frameworks for imagining and appreciating authority. Here as well, we believe that further enquiry into the post-war appreciation and legacy of rebel governance practices and institutions is an interesting avenue for further research.

By way of an epilogue, it is difficult to predict how long these memories of the FNL's wartime presence will continue to contribute to the group's survival. There are some examples of rebellions that can be thought of as historic losers but whose legacy continues to linger and provide legitimacy decades after the end of fighting (see, for example, Van Walraven [2013] on the Sawa rebellion in Niger). Burundi's current political situation remains very unpredictable. In the communes under study, FNL militants have reacted with mixed feelings to Rwasa's capricious positioning during the crisis that started in 2015. After first calling for a boycott of the vote, which was to some degree respected in Bujumbura Rural, Rwasa agreed to join Parliament and be part of the government. Many of the people who had been at the forefront of FNL resistance against the CNDD-FDD in Bujumbura Rural in recent years, at serious risk to their lives, were disappointed by Rwasa's decision, especially given that, in the meantime, the CNDD-FDD had tightened its grip on local institutions through the communal elections. The generational divide that is increasingly affecting Burundian politics also seems to determine reactions within the FNL regarding the party's position in the current crisis. While many of the older guard in Bujumbura Rural seem prepared to stick with Rwasa, a significant number of young militants and former combatants joined the ranks of anti-Nkurunziza protestors and the urban guerrilla movement in 2015. Interestingly, several of those young FNL militants told us they still considered themselves part of the FNL, but now were ready to rally behind the MSD's Sinduhije or the failed putsch leader

Godefroid Niyombare. Although the verdict is not in yet, it is clear that the ongoing crisis might have significant consequences for the longer-term viability of the party.

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### **Das Erbe des bewaffneten Aufstands in Burundis Maquis par Excellence**

**Zusammenfassung:** In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, inwieweit das politische Erbe des bewaffneten Aufstands in der Nachkriegsgesellschaft Burundis nachwirkt, wo zwei der wichtigsten politischen Parteien, die regierende CNDD-FDD und die FNL, aus früheren Rebellenbewegungen hervorgegangen sind. Der Autor möchte die Diskussion zur Transformation von Rebellengruppen in politische Parteien durch eine mikropolitische Perspektive ergänzen und zugleich die normative Seite der Debatte nuancieren. Aus seinen Beobachtungen zur Rolle lokaler Führungspersönlichkeiten mit FNL-Vergangenheit und aus der Popularität der Verwaltungsstrukturen der FNL während des Krieges in ihrer Hochburg Bujumbura Rural folgert er, dieses Erbe des Krieges sei nicht nur Symptom einer politischen Kultur der Gewalt, sondern müsse auch als eine differenziert zu bewertende Quelle von Macht und Legitimität in der Nachkriegsgesellschaft Burundis gesehen werden.

**Schlagwörter:** Burundi, Politisches System, Parteiengeschichte, FNL, Bürgerkrieg, Guerillaverbände